

Christo + Jeanne-Claude: Violence, Obsession, and the Monument

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The large-scale environmental and architectural wrappings of European artists Christo Javacheff and Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon serve as the foundation and spring board for my discussion of the construction of the monument's meaning within society. There are numerous aesthetic and intellectual implications of their endeavors from the early 1960s up until 2005. Amidst their oeuvre are massive walls of stacked, multi-colored oil barrels (figure 1,) widespread giant yellow and blue umbrellas (figure 2,) and most recently a series of saffron gates with flowing curtains (figure 3.) Perhaps their best known projects are their wrappings (figure 4.) I have constructed a thesis that examines the visual culture surrounding these controversial works of art. Psychoanalytic, literary, cultural, and historical disciplines have informed my investigations and support my argument that the monumental wrappings of Christo and Jeanne-Claude (the Christos) connote more than grandiose artistic beauty.

I will begin my examination of the visual culture of the Christos' projects by discussing the details of a specific project the duo realized in Berlin in 1995: *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971-95*. This monumental wrapping illustrates the concepts of the artists' projects in relation to the ideas of the historical monument that I will develop in this paper and thus serves as my primary point of reference. I will explore both the history of this culturally significant edifice as well as the symbolisms the Christos create with their wrapping of the Reichstag building. Furthermore, I contextualize the Wrapped Reichstag within the Christos' oeuvre of environmental projects.

I continue by mining the concept of the historic monument. Initially, I seek to trace the monument's etymological origins to reveal the underlying meanings of instruction, permanence, and the ironic sense of vitality instilled in the modern Western mentality concerning the

monument. I explore the intellectual history behind the monument's transformation from a simple marker of remembrance into a complex symbol representing numerous facets of bygone eras. Though this exploration begins in the classical time period, the Renaissance and the nineteenth century are the principal backgrounds to this story. The writings of Alois Riegl and Françoise Choay guide my investigation of the monument's conceptualization in the Western mindset. I turn to the writing of Odon Vallet to shed light upon the etymological curiosities of the term "monument" itself.

Following this introductory exploration of the monument, I survey the relationship between acts of violence and the monument. My questioning examines the various roles of agency or receptivity the monument takes on in association with aggression, hostility, and power. In this section I have looked to W.J.T. Mitchell's writings on violence and public art as well as Rene Girard's discussion of mimetic violence. Both authors' arguments reinforce my claim that the monument oscillates between roles of an aggressor and a target of violence and I assert that the projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude are located in the center of this binary relationship.

Delving deeper into this theme of violence and the monument I recount the common practice of *damnatio memoriae* in Ancient Rome. The work of Charles W. Hendrick Jr. informs my discussion of this topic. As the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude masks the monuments they wrap, comparing their projects with the practice of *damnatio memoriae* highlights the hostile commentary at work (figure 5.) *Damnatio memoriae* provides an interesting segue way into my discussion of counter monuments, a contemporary development amidst the many conceptualizations of the monument. Using James E. Young's writings on this topic and the example of the *Harburg Monument against Fascism* I argue that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects share many of the tenants of "counter-monumentalism" (figures 6-8.) A comparison

between the *Harburg* counter-monument and Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag* illustrates my argument (figure 4.) By contextualizing the Reichstag within German history and also by discussing the material characteristics of the Christos' projects I prepare the paper's transition to a deeper analysis of the artists' work.

My aim is to illustrate the intense and aggressive undercurrent of the Christos' monumental wrappings. The first radical element of the Christos' work that I will unfold is, ironically, their quest for permission to carry out each project. With few exceptions, the artists' works have been executed in complete compliance with local authorities. If a radical act is considered one that is countering a greater power, it is seemingly complaisant that the artists dutifully navigate the bureaucratic systems surrounding their intended projects. But the extent of their efforts to be granted such permission is quite extreme. Negotiating in the face of repeated rejection for decades over the rights to a project elevates their desires to wrap monuments to that of compulsion. The *Wrapped Reichstag* project illustrates the artists' characteristically manic pursuit of such a project and I will refer to it throughout my discussion of their work. Indeed, such psychoanalytic language suits the obsessive pursuit of certain projects and, in turn, reveals the truly aggressive nature of the artists' work. The visual evidence of these pursuits seeps into their works as well – informing the work's reputation and filling the pages of books published about each project. Indeed, the book created to document the Reichstag project excellently reveals the bureaucratic paths and obsessive pursuit of the artists.

The project drafts Christo creates bring these obsessive plans to life and they are the second body of evidence I will use to demonstrate the violent visual connotations present in the artists' work. These detailed collages and sketches map each monumental wrapping and also exhibit an aesthetic of aggression and control (figures 9-10.) Using cartographic and

documentary language, they communicate the militaristic understanding the duo has of each project site. The monument is depicted from every angle, inside and out. The Christos' drawings reflect the monument as if it were under close surveillance. This aspect of their work correlates with the obsessive nature of their pursuit for permission. These drawings and models resulting from probing architectural research are used to sway bureaucrats' opinions in their favor. By making each project as real as possible in miniature, the Christos hope to realize their large-scale fantasies. Yet another tacit assertion of the artists' power is the fact that these drafts also carry with them the threat of the Christos' intimate knowledge of the building after their thorough investigations.

The final aspect of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects that I will examine is the appearance of the wrapped monument itself. Bound tightly in strong cables and high tensile fabrics, the Christos completed works demonstrate a sadist aesthetic. Such works take on new meaning when one considers the long history of parallels constructed between the human body and architectural forms. The massive wrapping constricts, suffocates, and shrouds the monument (figure 11.) The complex knots securing the fabric also carry their own violent connotations as things that both tie and sever. The veil and the binds separate and fracture the monument transforming it physically as well as conceptually if only for a brief time. The monument as treated by Christo and Jeanne-Claude becomes a vestige or a ghost – a haunting reminder of its original appearance. Beyond fantastic and inspiring, their wrappings are aesthetically suggestive of violent themes. Due to the complicated nature of the modern historical monument's conceptions in the Western world, I believe that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's claims about their wrapped monuments merely skim the surface of what is really at work.

## The Reichstag Wrapping

The Reichstag project Christo and Jeanne-Claude began pursuing in December 1971 will serve as my main point of reference throughout my discussion of their monumental wrappings. It was not until June 1995 that this project was officially executed.<sup>1</sup> Completed in 1894, the Reichstag was the home of the German empire's parliament until 1933 when the Nazi party rose to power (figure 12.)<sup>2</sup> A destructive fire sustained by the Reichstag in 1933 was a pivotal moment in German history as it provided the opportunity for the Nazi party to take power. During the Third Reich and throughout World War II it continued to be the site of many significant political and historical moments: used by the Nazis for propaganda presentations and military purposes and targeted by the Soviets in air raids for its symbolic significance. After the war, the Reichstag was left in ruins and as the capital of West Germany had been relocated, it was essentially useless. However it was valued by the German people who rallied against its destruction and for its restoration in the 1960s. Until the reunification in 1990, the Reichstag acted as a museum exhibiting German history. It was only after the reunification of Germany that the building was once again used for political purposes. During the early 1990s the atmosphere of the newly reunited Berlin was still tense and undecided. The Reichstag building served as the site of the Reunification ceremony in October 1990. In 1992, German politicians decided to return the seat of the *Bundestag* to Berlin and house it once again in the Reichstag building. Reconstruction of the Reichstag began just after the Christos wrapped the landmark edifice in 1995.

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<sup>1</sup> David Bourdon. *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971-95*. (Köln; New York : Taschen, 2001.) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Michael S. Cullen, "The Reichstag: Its Turbulent History," in *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971-95*, David Bourdon (Köln; New York: Taschen, 2001), 23-35.

Just as the Soviets had targeted the Reichstag for its symbolic status in the German mentality, Christo and Jeanne-Claude too focused upon the monument for its national and historical symbolism; the timing of the project's execution fell in a particularly charged epoch of the Reichstag's existence.<sup>3</sup> The wrapping of the monument veiled it in a fabric mask, covering its stone façade with a material that conversely suggests transience. Fabric represents the antithesis of stone. It is typically a material that does not hold up over time. It can be cut, ripped, and penetrated easily by the elements of weather. The fabric of the Reichstag swathed over a tightly fitted steel skeleton was not unlike the fabric tents erected while a building is under construction (or restoration). It suggests the building is unfinished and under renovation. In another capacity, a fabric edifice – a tent – is an impermanent structure well known as the preferred structure of nomadic groups. Portable and light, these fabric structures are the opposite of the fixed monuments of the Western world. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's use of fabric to swaddle the Reichstag reversed the permanence embodied by this institutional monument in such a way that complicates its specific narrative in the German mindset. By wrapping the Reichstag, Christo and Jeanne-Claude complicated the monument's notions of permanency, which in turn complicated the concurrent rhetoric of democracy and German nationalism in ways that parallel with Young's Harburg example, which I will discuss in further detail later in this paper. The *Wrapped Reichstag* is certainly relative to Young's counter-monument for this reason.

There are consistent themes in the locations the artists seek to wrap. In general, their European projects have taken historic buildings, statues and city fixtures hostage, capturing and confining these proud cultural landmarks. Their works in the "new world" are generally more expansive, environmental projects: giant air packages, wrapped walkways, and wrapped coastlines. The undertones here are worth noting. The cultural memory instilled in the aged

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<sup>3</sup> Jok Church. "The Art of Christo and Jeanne-Claude." <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/wr.html>

European cityscape is an important aspect of the project of wrapping a monument and thus so is the complicated bundle of memory associated with it. The Christos' projects play with the audience's deeply instilled and often unconscious ideas about certain buildings and monuments. In the case of the Reichstag project, this was especially prevalent as the German audiences encountering the wrapped Reichstag were already contemplating the historic and political connotations of this symbolic building in the early years of reunification. With other projects however, under less of a political spotlight, the Christos' work still relies on a stable notion of what the institutional building, statue, or architectural monument means to the audience that is so familiar with it. Here, the concept of the historical monument that has been developed over the past century comes into play.

### The Historical Monument

The monument embodies the memory of a certain time, event or person. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, a monument is "A statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a famous or notable person or event." It is also defined as "something that by its survival commemorates and distinguishes a person, action, period, or event; something that serves as a memorial." Early use of the term monument refers to tombs or graveyards, linking the term directly to death.<sup>4</sup> By the fourteenth century the term monument had expanded to refer generally to "anything that preserves a memory of something."<sup>5</sup> Later, in the seventeenth century, the term encompassed the lasting arts, science and literary works. By the eighteenth

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<sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2007, s.v. "monument"

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



century, it denoted “edifices which are imposing by virtue of their grandeur or antiquity.”<sup>6</sup> Over time this term has gained many facets of sense and meaning.

The etymological origins of the word also provide insight to the cultural value instilled within monuments. Odon Vallet considers these origins in depth and through etymological analysis he explains the suggested meanings of this word/concept while also offering an explanation of how other words and concepts add weight to the word “monument”. Vallet begins his exploration of the monument by stating that its etymology shows it “oscillating between life and death, *eros* and *thanatos*, the passion of erection and the repose of tomb sculpture. In both cases, the monument enriches memory whether to visualize triumph or petrify misfortune.”<sup>7</sup> He points to polarities the monument represents. Here, life and death, passion and repose, triumph and misfortune; later, the visual and the mental.<sup>8</sup> These poles represent the continuums monuments traverse and in doing so breakdown the rigid conceptions of the monument as a lifeless, static structure. In acknowledging these extremes and placing each monument within them, the multiplicity of the monument is emphasized. Furthermore, its relationship to the people and history surrounding it are unavoidably implicated. The essential nature of the monument is deconstructed and something like a personality seems to take shape. From the Greek and Latin roots of this word there are connotations of fortification, instruction, memory and even of the notion of a “monster”.<sup>9</sup> Vallet’s analysis reveals that the monument is a historic memorial structure but also capable of life and living within people. It is physical and can be seen, touched, walked into and around. But it is lifelike in its concept—it can haunt, it embodies, it instructs, guides or demonstrates. The Reichstag building acts upon the German population in just this

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Odon Vallet. “Les mots du monument,” in *La Confusion des Monuments (Les Cahiers de médiologie 7)* (1999), 21-23. Translated by Aron Vinegar, Ohio State University.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

way. Over the course of its architectural lifetime it has lived many incarnations, and thus a monstrous sense of animation can be understood. I will turn to both of these concepts again later in this paper. Indeed, the Reichstag as such haunts the German population with its history, embodies the political past, and demonstrates the reunification. Change and evolution over time are key concepts for the monument. Yet simultaneously the monument is also imbued with ideas of immortality and stasis.

Vallet explains the seemingly natural permanency of monuments through their role as long-lasting physical markers, instructors of how and what to remember. He asserts that the monument is a “perpetual work in progress,” a result of its constant interpretation and reinterpretation. Though seemingly contradictory, Vallet claims that it is because of this on-going progressive nature that the monument can endure over centuries. The monument and its ever-evolving interpretations are inherited by each generation who in turn reevaluate its meaning anew. Thus, he maintains that the monument transforms over time to adapt to memory. Perhaps this is why the Germans rallied behind the Reichstag’s restoration, despite its fraught and fractured past. Regardless of the Reichstag’s place in the Third Reich or its decades of vacancy and deterioration this building continues to be reinterpreted by the German population as a firm nationalistic symbol.

It is because the monument is both static yet continuously adaptive to contemporary societies that Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s wrapped monuments – such as the Reichstag – bear such considerable meaning. The artists choose architectural and memorial structures that are imbued with both stable, historic ideas as well as contemporary cultural importance. The specific siting of their works at culturally significant locales is a crucial aspect of their projects. With the Reichstag, their wrapping was executed at a key moment in German history, thus making the

project's symbolism and meaning more complex than plain aesthetics. If the Christos did not choose project sites that were so invested in the national and historic fabric of the surrounding community (and beyond), the visual appearance of the wrapped monument would not work to interfere with the traditional and iconic image of the monument as it does. Due to the evolving nature of the historical monument, it maintains its stable image in society. The Christos rely on this stability for their work to have an impact.

Françoise Choay dates the conception of the “historic monument” to the year 1420 in Rome, amidst the Quattrocento.<sup>10</sup> After a nearly one thousand year respite, the classical forms of Ancient Greece and Rome were revived by the artists, architects and intellectuals of the early Italian Renaissance. From this time on the monument experienced attention it had never before received. The surviving architecture and monumental structures of the past provided formal models as well as inspiration for influential artists, architects, and theorists such as Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Alberti. In addition to the study of ancient Greek and Roman texts, the surviving structures of the past informed the designs of a new classicism. With the reproduction of classical forms came the consciousness of the historical thrust of the built environment.

Initially, interest in historic monuments was limited to those of ancient Rome and Greece but as time progressed, the remains of other civilizations came to bear similar values. Nonetheless, the attention paid to the monuments of Antiquity during the Quattrocento and Renaissance was the first to focus upon their historical significance, valorize their creator's artistic vision, and worry over their conservation and preservation.<sup>11</sup> These concerns are the specific legacies this time period bestowed upon the conceptualization of the monument in modern Western thought. From the end of the sixteenth century through the first half of the

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<sup>10</sup> Françoise Choay. *Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O'Connell. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.) 19

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

nineteenth century, classical remains became the “subject of an immense effort of conceptualization and inventory.”<sup>12</sup> Thus began the trajectory of the complex meaning making and the preoccupation with saving the material leftovers of bygone eras.

Emerging from the body of scholarly discussion concerning the monument at the end of the nineteenth century is Alois Riegl’s investigation of monumental ideology. With *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin*, Riegl outlines the way in which monuments were understood and how these material objects were imbued with subjective values. He distinguished three categories of monuments in the modern mindset: the intentional monument, the unintentional monument, and the age-value monument. The intentional monument, “in its oldest and most original sense is a human creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations.”<sup>13</sup> Intentional monuments are distinguished with an original *intentionality* intended by the creators of these monuments. The unintentional monument is one whose meaning is interpreted not by their makers, but by modern ideas about these monuments.<sup>14</sup> This is to say that such monuments are imbued with historical meaning by later generations who associate them with the past, as exemplified by the German population’s sentiments towards the Reichstag building in Berlin. Finally, the age-value monument is any object that “trigger[s] in the beholder a sense of the life cycle.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, age-value monuments evoke the sense of history regardless of one’s actual familiarity with specific historical narrative. Thus, age-value

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>13</sup> Alois Riegl. “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin.” *Oppositions Reader: Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture, 1973-1984*. Ed. K. Michael Hays. p. 621 (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998.).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 623

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 624

monuments may not always signify a particular history but rather the past in a larger and more general sense.

Both the unintentional and age-value monument relate to the notion of cultural memory—a memory that is instilled in a human by his or her culture. Cultural memory as defined by Jan Assmann is “knowledge that directs behavior and experience” in a society and that is obtained “through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.”<sup>16</sup> Because of the generational passing-on of cultural memory it is deeply instilled within members of a society. Thus monuments such as the Reichstag falling into Riegl’s categories of unintentional and age-value are bound to ideas and memories that seem innate to a culture which in turn intensifies the relationship between a monument and society. These monuments serve to remind audiences of the life cycle, perhaps even to accelerate it by marking it visually and physically.

Memory, and subsequently the trauma of memory, are inseparable elements from the monument. The monument must be traumatic in some way in order to be effective. It must work to upset, unsettle, or disturb the regular patterns of memory so as not to be forgotten. Choay states that the monument *shakes* the individual’s memory.<sup>17</sup> Such language alludes to a physical aspect of the mental interaction between the monument as a signifier and the viewer identifying the meaning of its message. The monument is meant to *move* the viewer; it is mentally jarring amidst the everyday landscape in which it exists. Yet many monuments serve to contain and cauterize their traumatic roots. Scholars such as James E. Young argue that the traditional monument enclose and sanitize the trauma of monuments. Young’s account of memory asserts an imperative notion of traumatic memory in relation to the monument explaining the rejection of traditional memorials which:

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<sup>16</sup> Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity.” *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 126.

<sup>17</sup> Choay, 32.

Either console viewers or redeem such tragic events, or indulge in a facile kind of *Wiedergutmachung* or purport to mend the memory of a murdered people. [...] Instead of searing memory into public consciousness, [...] some monuments] seal memory off from awareness altogether.<sup>18</sup>

These aspects of the architectural monuments Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrap complicate and add depth to the connotations of their work. Their projects transform the monument and force the public to reconsider the familiarity of this architectural and monumental object. If the monument in question has been serving to “console viewers” and allow memory to be sealed off, the Christos’ project can work to renew consciousness and memory. On the other hand, if the monument still signifies a particularly traumatic memory their wrapping could exacerbate this sentiment as the wrapping is a sort of defacement. Further, their project could also serve to calm and soothe a traumatic monument by disguising it temporarily – as I believe it does in the case of the Reichstag. These are simply three suppositions to exemplify how Young’s statement illustrates the multi-dimensional effects of the Christos’ projects.

Perhaps Riegl’s most important contribution to the discourse on monuments is the implication of subjective modern thought in terms of the values applied to monuments, suggesting that such values are not materially intrinsic but mentally manifest. This observation was delivered by Riegl at a key moment in history. When his essay was published in 1903, nineteenth century Romanticism had permeated throughout Western culture and such romantic notions of the historic monument were only encouraged by growing anxieties about modernization. But in the nineteenth century, more than ever before, the monument became crystallized as symbolic of human accomplishment, nationalism, and cultural authority. Renewed interest in classical ideas and the past sought desperately to grasp and hold onto some sort of

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<sup>18</sup> James E. Young. “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today.” *Art and the Public Sphere*. W.J.T. Mitchell, ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.) 54.

solidity in the face of the instability and uncertainty of modernity. These attempts barely masked the crumbling reality of the traditional monument as the advances of modernity encroached upon such old-fashioned ideas. Nevertheless, intellectual and artistic attention to the traditional monument preserved and upheld many classical ideas related to it. Historically, monuments were erected to commemorate powerful leaders, triumphant battles, and accomplished civilizations. They were also known as physical tributes to the dead, the spiritual, and the celestial. The notion of historical narrative was inextricably tied to such symbolisms. And so the monolith of the monument began to solidify.

The fetishization of the monument rendered it an advantageous tool for institutions and authorities. Surviving built structures and sculptures from the past became the material anchors to which modern institutions secured their political agendas. This manipulation of the unintentional monument mirrors the legacy of the intentional monuments of the past whose erections were intended to remind viewers of a particular individual's or group's superiority. The monument is therefore an imposing object, forcing all who encounter it to recognize its symbolic message. This illustrates the reciprocal relationship of the monument and its audience as well as provides background for the undeniably complex relationship between violence and the monument. But the wrapped monument temporarily disrupts this monolithic force. Beyond the Wrapped Reichstag, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects interrupt the relationship between the monument and its audience. They are resistant pulses within the monumental historic timeline.

### Violence and the Monument

Despite resistance from some intellectuals and artists, the monument continues to stand as an overt symbol of power. As such, the implication of force is unavoidable. W.J.T. Mitchell

cites early examples of triumphal arches, obelisks, and imposing statues when posing the question: “Is violence built into the monument in its very conception? Or is violence simply an accident that befalls some monuments, a matter of the fortunes of history?”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, many monuments embody the memories of certain bloody, brutal times and can often represent oppression to past and present populations. Mitchell explains that violence may be “encoded” in monuments in three different ways: the monument as a representation of violence, the monument as a device for attack, or the monument as an act or object of violence—alternately inflicting or suffering violence.<sup>20</sup> The reversal of the monument from a reverent subject, preserving the past and memorializing the dead, to a hostile, violent one is curious but not opposed. Violence or trauma is the foundation of the monument. Trauma is the impetus of the monument and the monument is a containment of trauma. This exchange does not seem possible in the generally positive connotations this figure typically bears. Freud’s remarks on ambivalence – the coexistence of love and hate – provide parallels to this situation:

We started out from the great opposition between the life and death instincts. Now object-love itself presents us with a second example of a similar polarity—that between love (or affection) and hate (or aggressiveness). [...] But how can the sadist instinct, whose aim it is to injure the object, be derived from Eros, the preserver of life? Is it not plausible to suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct which under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object?<sup>21</sup>

The question stands, whether the drive to harm the object is derived from instincts of love or of death. In light of Mitchell’s remarks, the same question could be asked of the monument’s construction. Is the monument a representation of violence, trauma, and death? Or is it an

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<sup>19</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell. “The Violence of Public Art: *Do the Right Thing*.” *Art and the Public Sphere*. Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). 34-35.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. James Strachey, trans. (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961). 64-65



affirmative reminder of life? As a marker of violence inflicted upon others, it is a reminder of death and thus the monument plays the role of aggressor, worthy of attack. Yet as a memorial of life lived, the monument plays the role of the victim of violence when attacked. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects place them in the center of this binary relationship, both attacking a power structure by conquering bureaucracy and victimizing valuable memory of life lived by blocking the monument's symbolic image.

Rene Girard's writings on mimetic violence provide an interesting angle from which one may approach this topic of the aggressive monument – specifically the imposition of memory by the monument – or, perhaps more precisely, the indirect imposition of memory by the monument builder. He writes: "It is no longer the intrinsic value of the object that inspires the struggle; rather, it is the violence itself that bestows the value upon objects, which are only pretexts for a conflict."<sup>22</sup> In resonance with Mitchell's questioning, this assertion claims that indeed the monument is intrinsically violent if it is to bear meaning. Further it suggests that the greater the violence associated with the monument, the greater the significance of the monument. This proposes that it is not the particular memory-meaning associated with the monument that moves an audience but the monument's forceful action of imposition that initiates the exchange of aggressions. In other words, the monument's ability to unavoidably remind viewers of its inherent authority and aggression acts as the pretext to more violent acts. The power of the monument as a signifier is the cause for hostility instead of the message signified. The monument's presence as a reminder of a triumphant war battle, a powerful leader, or a strong national authority imposes the domination of that subject over an often unseen opponent. This message is broadcast to the public who may either be in compliance with this political agenda or

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<sup>22</sup> Rene Girard. *Violence and the Sacred*. Patrick Gregory, trans. (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1977.) 144

disagree with it in some way. In both circumstances, the public audience is involuntarily subjected to the monument; the choice remains whether to comply or resist its memorial mandate.

In classical civilizations such as ancient Rome, it was common to vandalize or deface a monument of the previous ruler and sometimes simply replace images with those of the victor. During war, monuments would suffer routine stripping and the spolia would be used in creating the monuments of the new regime. To conquer a ruler was to remove him from power, but to deface his monuments was to remove him from memory and rewrite history. The systematic erasure of the identities of Roman public enemies in portraits, architectural inscriptions, or historical documents was not uncommon. Often these public mutilations remained on display in their violated state as a reminder of the public enemy. This practice is now referred to as *damnatio memoriae* and its performance was an overt action upon the memory-meaning of a monument; an action that reinforced memory overall, but dramatically changed the original intent of the monument – over generations, it had the effect of silencing memory. Charles W. Hendrick Jr. underlines the significance of *damnatio memoriae* in relation to the monument within the culture of ancient Rome explaining that it should “be understood as dissimulatory, a masquerade.”<sup>23</sup> The work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude masks monuments through the act of wrapping. Comparing their projects with the practice of *damnatio memoriae* highlights the commentary at work in these projects. While the Christos’ work only defaces the monument temporarily, it operates as Hendrick states *damnatio memoriae* should be understood as a mask of the monument. Interestingly, the Reichstag project masked this historic German edifice at a

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<sup>23</sup> Charles W. Hendrick Jr. “Remembering to Forget.” *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity*. (University of Texas Press: Austin, 2000.) 117

crucial point in its politically charged lifespan; a time of reunification and restoration, somewhat like the practice of *damnatio memoriae* during political upheaval in ancient Rome.

Hendrick argues that the Romans demonstrated a frank understanding of the monument's function in their performance of destroying memory's material investments.<sup>24</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude's vast tarpaulin covers mask their subjects, obscuring the visual and mental associations with the monument the audience has cultivated over time. As in the practice of *damnatio memoriae*, their work is put on display and invokes the audience to meditate upon the cultural significance of the monument. The wrapping conceals and disfigures the monument in some ways while accentuating and emphasizing it in others. While acts of *damnatio memoriae* were intended to attack the specific individuals represented by monuments, the radical critique of the monument that arose in the twentieth century – which Christo and Jeanne-Claude are certainly players in – sought to deconstruct both the entity represented as well as the concept of the monument itself. Amidst this critique the counter-monument developed.

### Counter-Monument

*Damnatio memoriae* was a pronounced act of silencing the monument in resistance to what it stood for. One central aspect of the counter-monument addresses this issue of silence and silencing, however with quite a different intention. In the latter half of the twentieth century, monument builders began to examine the ways in which conventional memorials act to soothe traumatic memories and in doing so, paradoxically aid the process of forgetting.<sup>25</sup> From such examinations the concept of a counter-monument arises. Young defines counter-monuments in basic terms as “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Young, 54.

premises of their being.”<sup>26</sup> Such monuments succeed in resisting many aspects of the traditional monument – radically critiquing it in ways that many artists and intellectuals were interested in during the 1960s. Young’s interpretation of the counter-monument relates to the wrapping projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude – such as the *Wrapped Reichstag* – quite well. Their vast and colorful sheaths transform longstanding monuments forcing a new consciousness upon the audience. The counter-monument addresses the trauma of the event a monument is intended to soothe. The Reichstag wrapped by Christo and Jeanne-Claude brought the history of that monument to the center and in doing so the audience must address its past.

Young illustrates the significance of the counter-monument with his explorations of the problematic nature of German monuments commemorating the Holocaust. He explains how counter-monuments in these cases are more effective than traditional monuments. This first requires an investigation into why traditional monuments fail at adequately observing the horrifying results of the Holocaust. Young analyzes the relationship between the traditional monument and the act of remembering; for the Germans he argues, acknowledging and remembering the holocaust is a painful act and often monuments can serve to alleviate the need for having to remember, operating instead as construction for closure, and initiating the process of forgetting.

Young continues to briefly explain the modernist problems with the monument, as they have been articulated by Lewis Mumford and Rosalind Krauss. He quotes Mumford saying “The notion of a modern monument is veritably a contradiction [...] If it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern it is not a monument.”<sup>27</sup> He emphasizes Mumford’s idea that the monument works against the tenets of modern urban civilization: the ability to continuously

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 54.

renew and rejuvenate. He mentions Krauss's contribution because it questions whether the modern monument can ever be more than an abstraction of the traditional concept of monumentality; can the modern monument be anything more than a "pure marker" or anything beyond self-referential?<sup>28</sup> He goes on to assert the worry that the modern monument allows a population to forget instead of enabling them to invest in the commitment of memory. He states, "Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always be there to remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience."<sup>29</sup>

The counter-monument addresses these modernist concerns and reacts against the conventional portrayal of a monumental structure. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects certainly engage in these counter-monumental behaviors. Young draws from several examples to illustrate his points on counter-monumentality, one in particular – the *Harburg Monument against Fascism* – shares subtle but important parallels with the projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, specifically their much celebrated *Wrapped Reichstag*. This example compares well with Young's example of the Harburg Monument because of the similar nationalistic and historical themes tied to the monuments.

The *Harburg Monument against Fascism* was a large, lead-plated, hollow aluminum pillar that was gradually lowered into the ground.<sup>30</sup> The citizens of Harburg were encouraged to use a steel pointed stylus to etch their messages and names into the pillar's soft lead plating. As reachable sections of the pillar became filled with memorial graffiti, the monument was lowered into the ground, eventually disappearing altogether. This monument contradicts the heavy, solid and permanent nature of the conventional monument. Furthermore, in creating a work that is tormenting, constantly altered – vandalized by invitation – by the public, self-consuming, and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 56-58.

will eventually cease to exist, the artists behind the Harburg work succeeded in building a counter-monument. The Harburg counter-monument also alludes to the fragmentation and violence inherent in the counter monument – the Harburg monument’s encouragement of vandalism and its “knife-like” plunge literally into Germany<sup>31</sup>.

The monuments wrapped by Christo and Jeanne-Claude each embody notions of European power, authority and nationalism. Almost like an act of *damnatio memoriae*, their wrapping projects temporarily transform these memorial fixtures distorting the message of the monument entirely. This alteration operates to make a traditional monument into a radical counter monument. Young’s Harburg example acknowledges the traditional monument’s fascist past, imposing permanence, political performance, and authority despite its objectivity.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s selection of the Reichstag in Berlin as a project highlights the structure’s political, historical, and national significance.

### Stalking: The Aesthetics of Bureaucracy

Christo and Jeanne-Claude are well known names in the art world, but compared to the deified monuments they desire to wrap, they are mere mortals. Many of their most prominent projects have taken decades to be physically realized. As the artists set their sights upon architectural forms and monuments that belong to both the public and private spheres, permission must be granted in order to execute their massively scaled installations. Christo and Jeanne-Claude are famous for their tireless persistence in winding through bureaucratic mazes in order to receive consent for their wrappings – to an extent that could be seen as fanatical. Their challenge to bureaucracy and their brief defacement of iconic landmarks is audacious. Though

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 56.

these endeavors are not necessarily heroic, Christo and Jeanne-Claude cast themselves as such in their catalogues, reinscribing the notion of the artist as genius.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's "David and Goliath" story is what has interested audiences in the Christos' work for decades. The fruition of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's persistent efforts is a project that temporarily equalizes the artists with the monumental structures they wrap and the systems with which they spar. For the few weeks the Reichstag was wrapped, the duo had seemingly conquered all – the building, the bureaucratic maze, and the nationalistic history. The completed wrapping is the embodiment of their decades-long hunt. Their efforts to work within bureaucratic systems in order to create artworks that critique what those systems stand for demonstrate a perverse humor. The extreme degree of their obsession is demonstrated by their passionate pursuit of agreement from the state of institution and their elaborate blue prints (plans of attack). After all this strenuous work done by two seemingly normal individuals, the great monument is on view for a set amount of time, wrapped up and tied down. The Christos' work not only exudes a violent aesthetic, but the avenues traversed to realize their projects attest to the aggression and compulsion underlying each project.

For twenty-four years the artists chased after their fantasy of the Reichstag wrapped. Initially Christo created his signature collages envisioning the project. Eventually, Christo and Jeanne-Claude began to stalk the Reichstag with meticulous on site inspections and by drafting detailed plans. By 1984, the exact procedure of how to wrap the building was decided upon – over ten years before the project was executed.<sup>33</sup> From 1971 to 1995, the Christos visited Germany 54 times, met individually with hundreds of members of the Bundestag, and held numerous press conferences to promote the project.<sup>34</sup> Yet despite all their efforts, Christo and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 4.

Jeanne-Claude were repeatedly rejected permission to wrap the Reichstag. Other grand projects planned by the duo have been similarly dismissed and the Christos have refused to let go of any of their dreams. This struggle is a major aspect of their work and the artists demonstrate their pride for this in many ways. For example, the years marking a project's naissance and realization typically are part of the final title. Though some may say the artists are passionate about actualizing their planned projects, there seems to be an underlying compulsion fueling their pursuits. To so fanatically chase after what is time and time again denied suggests an addiction to or an infatuation with the thrill of the hunt.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's obsessive path to realizing their grand projects matches that of a fixated stalker or the compulsive persistence of an addicted gambler. Psychoanalytically, a "fixation" is an attachment of the libido to certain images or persons which produces a feeling of satisfaction.<sup>35</sup> Certainly the Christos have built their lives' work around such attachments. The sort of fixation displayed by the Christos upon their goals attests to their commitment to their art. One must also assume that there is some sort of satisfaction in their attachment and persistence—certainly it makes the completion of a project more valorous and interesting.

Jonathan Fineberg points out that Christo and Jeanne-Claude undermine bureaucratic structures by working with and through them to achieve their art.<sup>36</sup> He praises their approach to this sort of radical act—the individual conquering the system or institution. But perhaps the Christos have become addicted to the rush of overcoming the systems in place. Their tenacity is a curious aspect of their work and much evidence exists of the bureaucratic hoops they have had to jump through: petitioning to countless government officials, private landowners, institutional

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<sup>35</sup>Jean Laplace and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: New York, 1973 .)

<sup>36</sup>Jonathan Fineberg. "Christo and Jeanne-Claude," in *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being*. (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers: New York, 2000.) 357.



leaders, and the like. Christo and Jeanne-Claude even have suffered the cost of high fines for laws their projects have broken. Volunteer workers have died during their projects.<sup>37</sup> Yet they keep at it. They continue to work for permission and fixate upon the idea of the project.

The artists demonstrate compulsive behaviors in the pursuit of their projects. From a psychoanalytic perspective, compulsions are “form[s] of behavior to which the subject is obliged by an internal constraint. Thoughts (obsessions), actions, defensive operations or even complex patterns of behavior may be termed compulsive where their not being accomplished is felt as inevitably giving rise to anxiety.”<sup>38</sup> The inability of the Christos to let go of a project after repeated rejection attests to these outlined compulsive behaviors. An instance exemplifying their compulsion and the resulting anxiety occurred near the time of completing the fateful *The Umbrellas, Japan – USA, 1984 – 1991*, when a German reporter inquired about the languishing plans for the Reichstag project. It was then that Christo “impatiently *snapped*” at this inquiry, demanding that if the Germans wanted the Reichstag wrapped, they would now have to ask for it.<sup>39</sup> Not long before this incident, Christo “*warned* Mayor Diepgen that, if the Germans did not make up their minds soon, he and Jeanne-Claude would be fully engaged on another of their projects.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly the decades of fixation upon the Reichstag project were wearing on Christo. The compulsive pursuit of this wrapping for so many years had exacerbated a sense of anxiety about the project, causing Christo to uncharacteristically flare up and turn on the very people who would grant permission for the Reichstag project. Alternatively, perhaps the snap could also be explained by Freud’s ideas of delaying pleasure – the longer one waits, the more the

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<sup>37</sup> Bourdon, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Laplanche, 127.

<sup>39</sup> Bourdon, 41. My emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 37. My emphasis.

excitement builds and thus the greater the force with which one might explode.<sup>41</sup> Clearly at the end of a long pursuit the Christos receive a rush from their delayed efforts.

Much like Kafka's protagonist K. in his last novel, The Castle, the artists' frustrations with the bureaucratic system mounted; Christo and Jeanne-Claude had worked for decades towards their plans, systematically rattling through the ranks of the German government. David Bourdon's book, published in 2001, documents the Reichstag project and reads as a testament of the Christos' bureaucratic experience. Utilizing the visual language of documentary cinema, the book mixes reproductions of Christo's striking collages with photos and copies of memos, letters, and government paperwork. In the black and white still shots scattered throughout the book, one can see the cycles of excitement and interest, boredom and frustration experienced by the Christos and the German bureaucrats. The reproduction of numerous official memoranda and letters reveals the long winded decorum – typically secluded to private meetings and files – to their entire audience. Thus the Reichstag book provides insight into the bureaucratic fine points the artists aggressively followed for so long.

The worth of each project is enhanced by the nature of the fight. When the Reichstag was finally wrapped in 1995 it was a major triumph for the artists. The Christos were (and still are) lauded for their tenacity in challenging the system. Perhaps the struggle for each wrapping imbues that particular monument with a new sense of value as yet again in history, violence and desire have surrounded that object. Rene Girard has explained the nature of a relationship between violence and desire that is suited to the discussion of the Christos' repeated clashes with the system:

Violent opposition, [...] is the signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that 'beautiful totality' whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable. The victim of this violence both adores it and detests it. He strives to master it by means

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<sup>41</sup> Freud, 65.

of a mimetic counter-violence and measures his own stature in proportion to his failure. If by chance, however, he actually succeeds in asserting his mastery over the model, the latter's prestige vanishes. He must then turn to an even greater violence and seek out an obstacle that promises to be truly insurmountable.<sup>42</sup>

Girard touches upon the idea that opposition signifies desire. He explores the ambivalence of the victim and explains the need to overcome violent opposition and counter it with an even more intense force. In the case of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's compulsive pursuits, bureaucratic resistance to their proposals invigorates the artists and the eventual consent and conquering of the monument inspires them to pursue even more difficult projects. Girard's understanding of the relationship between violence and desire suits the Christos quite well. Both opposition and consent encourage the artists' behaviors and hardly weaken their desires to wrap a particular landmark. Opposition sets the stage for interplay between the artists and grand bureaucratic systems and in such a setting; the artists must display a certain level of aggression to be heard. Thus the fact that they fight so hard to complete their enormous projects, obsessively planning and working through red tape, yet claim in the end each work is merely an embodiment of beauty is surprising. It is a strangely capricious attitude to conclude such a compulsively pursued project. The Christos draw attention to their enduring battles for each project by making the dates of its pursuit part of the work's title. The aggressive energy devoted to achieving each wrapping is an undeniable facet of each project, complicating any proclaimed simplicity.

### Plans of Attack

Further evidence of the underbelly of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrapped projects lies within the aesthetics of their plans, drawings and drafts. These detailed drafts serve as Christo and Jeanne-Claude's plans of attack. Long before any of the Christos' projects are realized

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<sup>42</sup> Girard, 148.

physically, they are meticulously drafted and redrafted in a number of angles, lights, and media. The artists utilize collage, photographs and illustration to visualize their ideas. It is the sale of these works that ends up financing their large-scale wrappings.<sup>43</sup> Many projects - though extensively developed on paper, in collage, and in three dimensional models - are never fully realized.

The numerous revisions and multiplicity of perspectives exposes every angle of the structure the artists have their sites on. The collage format so many of these drafts are created in juxtaposes technical data such as maps, blueprints, thumbnail photos, fabric swatches, and floor plans – all the facts necessary to penetrate and overtake the monument. Aerial maps of the city’s plan situate the structure among the various routes of entry and escape; black and white photographs unblinkingly document the scene; blueprints and floor plans reveal the building’s hidden innards. At times, the vestigial lines drawn to align the drawing’s perspective even double as crosshairs, narrowing in on the target. All of these visual attributes convey the impending violence of the project of wrapping the monument. The project drafts resemble the designs of high profile thieves or military troops used to infiltrate, attack, and pillage.

Michel De Certeau describes maps as memoranda prescribing actions and also as the colonizers of space.<sup>44</sup> A map relates the place to human action, measuring unseen distances and relating unknown landmarks. For centuries maps have been the product of and tools for aggressive action. The process of cartography involves extensive exploration of a particular space that inevitably renders the map-maker an intruder. Even if that space is the native soil of that particular map-maker, such meticulous examination is conversely alienating and he remains a stranger. Much like Jean-Luc Nancy’s *l’intrus*, the foreign cartographer probes the details of a

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<sup>43</sup> Fineberg, 357.

<sup>44</sup> Michel De Certeau. “Spatial Stories” from *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*. Ed. Susan L. Robertson. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001.) 93-94.

landscape “without right, familiarity, accustomedness, or habit” and remains a stranger, disturbing the intimacy and privacy that existed previously.<sup>45</sup> Thus the actions prescribed by the map extend beyond what they suggest to the map reader and encompass the intrusive actions of the cartographer.

From the fifteenth century through the seventeenth century – notably the period during which the modern ideas of science were being conceived – the map was increasingly viewed as an object of data disassociated with the rather subjective process of cartography, such that today one sees a map and hardly considers how it was made. The map-maker remains the covert author of axiomatic materials, and thus the map is an autocratic and subjective product despite the fact it is not commonly recognized as such. Christo’s use of maps in his drafts and collages draws upon the tacit authority they hold. Maps orient the project within space and the city; they give the project specific dimensions as well as an exact longitude and latitude. The monument in question is honed in on and outlined in red or remains a tiny highlighted speck amidst the sprawling city that claims it. The perspective provided by these maps suggests an interest in specific location akin to siege warfare or espionage. These connotations are unavoidably antagonistic. “X” marks the spot and Christos have set their sights on it.

Architectural plans and blueprints are frequent features of the collages and drafts. Even more localized than a map, these provide the precise measurements of every facet of the monument. Like maps they communicate action – they are the patterns of how the structure is crafted. They also reveal the structural secrets of the edifice, flattening it out and noting every architectural detail possible. Cross-sections reveal the intimate insides of the monument from top to bottom. Floor plans are included in many of these drafts as well, noting the situation of columns, rotundas, and grand rooms within the monument. This tactic lends Christo’s collages

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy. *L’Intrus*. Trans. Susan Hanson. (East Lansing, MI : Michigan State University Press, 2002.) 2.

an authoritative tone. They are striking compilations of data and ideas that connote Christo and Jeanne-Claude's thorough understanding of the building they seek to wrap. They provide eerie testament that the Christos know these monuments inside and out in a very literal sense.

Since 1969, the Christos have traveled with professional photographers in order to carefully document possible locations.<sup>46</sup> Christo's incorporation of black and white photographic stills of the sites to be wrapped has a similar didactic effect as the maps and blueprints. Photos of the monument capture it from multiple angles as if it were under surveillance. Furthermore, many of these stills document the living monument – that is how it interacts with the city around it – by noting the cars, parking lots, pedestrians, and bus lines that coexist with the structure. Orange grids and black oblique bars are layered upon these panoptic photographs, severing the complete image and parceling it into geometric or perspectival chunks. With this Christo has taken a bluntly factual image and insinuated his intentions once more. In doing so, he has dismembered the image of the monument. His marks or “crosshairs” once again reassert his agency and the artists' invasive intentions. Another technique Christo employs with the photos is to paint and draw his vision of the wrapping directly upon the structure. This gesture forcibly conflates the fantasy of the wrapped monument and the reality of its urban surroundings. Unlike the realistic and completely hand-drawn drafts which are the product of Christo's imagination, these mutant images are substantiated by their photographic landscapes. Yet again, Christo's artistic additions reassert his subjective view of the monument. In doing so he profits from the truth-affirming visual connotations of documentary media as well as those of the absolute authorship of the artist's own hand.

The collages and drafts drawn up in preparation for the Christos' projects are a unique and marketable trademark of the duo. They are the material alters built by Christo to each

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<sup>46</sup> Fineberg, 358.

nascent project and they bear his personal touch from the stroke of his brush, to the engineering diagrams commissioned by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, to Christo's distinctively wild handwriting scrawled in the margins. The visible grids and exposed tape on the collages emphasize the human creation of these plans, distinguishing them from mechanically produced data. Fineberg terms Christo's refined artistic vocabulary "autographic" and not only are his collages distinctly his own, but they are the Christos' tag upon a structure.<sup>47</sup> Like the vandals of ancient Rome practicing *damnatio memoriae*, the collages and subsequent wrappings mark the monument as Christo and Jeanne-Claude's, presenting the triumph of the individual over the institution whether it has already been achieved or not. A significant aspect of their oeuvre, their project drafts are the strategic visualizations of domination.

### The Wrapped Form

However compulsively the Christos pursue a project or militaristically draft their plans, it is the actual aesthetic of the wrapped monument that seems the most directly brutal. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrapped objects are draped in high-tensile fabrics and bound tightly with cables. There is an undeniable visual allusion to sadistic practice in this aesthetic. Wrapped objects are trapped within their packaging. Opaque fabrics mask the object and shroud it in uniformity, denying the specific details of its identity while accentuating its form simultaneously. The cords and cables that bind the fabric are tied in countless irregular knots that seem impossible to loosen. The package-like form connotes that it has been cruelly abducted, sheathed in plastic or tarpaulin and bound in complicated ties. The object's body is constricted; its soft parts crudely bulge from under the strain of the ropes.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 357.

Architectural forms and the human body have been compared for millennia. Spyros Papapetros establishes connection between architecture and something akin to humanity – life, gesture, and animism – in an essay examining German cinema, literature and architecture in the early twentieth century. His explanation of animation is worth noting:

The first is material; it describes metamorphoses, material transmutations from the animate to the inanimate, from the organic to the inorganic, from the amoebic to the vegetal and so on. The second is temporal; it refers to revivals, survivals, and temporal reanimations of ancient themes inside the chronological collage of modernism[...] Animation and its objects can never have a normal life, and so they live in perpetual *afterlife*. Animated objects are essentially vampires—a cluster of solidified desires that neither properly live nor die.<sup>48</sup>

Papapetros here alludes to the lives of old German houses in this section on animation and the nature of this livelihood. For him, they are permeated with human feelings of aggression and hostility. Likewise, monuments and monumental buildings possess these qualities as well; the monument is alive, breathing, and feeling. It undergoes a life cycle of its own, beginning with a glorious birth, ending with a brutal death, but persisting with a haunting afterlife. The Christos' projects attack this living architectural body. La Porte sums it up nicely by saying, "The wrapping, the veil, [and] the shroud are the signifiers of death."<sup>49</sup> Cloaking the monument, the Christos suffocate its spirit (*breath*) and suck out its life.<sup>50</sup>

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrappings temporarily veil the monument, disguising its typically exposed façade. For La Porte, the veil represents the shroud of death or the sheet thrown over the furniture of an abandoned home.<sup>51</sup> In the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was used to convey ideas such as exoticism, eroticism and oppressed

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<sup>48</sup> Spyros Papapetros. "Malicious Houses: Animation, Animism, Animosity in German Architecture and Film--From Mies to Murnau." *Grey Room* no. 20 (2005):11-12.

<sup>49</sup> LaPorte, Dominique G. *Christo*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.) 37.

<sup>50</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2007, s.v. "spirit."

<sup>51</sup> La Porte., 37.



femininity.<sup>52</sup> Specifically during the Victorian period in England the veil was a literary symbol of “secrecy, deceit, perversity and entrapment.”<sup>53</sup> Thus the symbology of the veil in the West is complex and most often carries a negative implication. Yet this term also bears the connotations of protection and humility and thus the wrappings of Christo and Jeanne-Claude are more than just innocent veils.

Looking at the early works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, it is easy to trace the lineage of a violent visual aesthetic. The initial wrappings of small objects did not bear the same humanity as did Christo’s wrapped portraits – the literal wrapping of painted portraits in clear plastic and twine. Later, the studio project, *Packed Girl*, wrapped a live model, reifying the abusive element of the Christo’s concept.<sup>54</sup> This project demonstrates an early experimentation with the veiling concept. Sketched nudes lie outstretched and “packaged” in transparent plastic, bound excessively with rope. Naked and exposed the body is also bound and covered. Christo’s drawing of *Wrapped Woman, Project for the film “Empaquetage d’une femme”, May 1963*, in *London and Düsseldorf* sketches one of these wrapped nudes in a hanged position: wrapped, tied and dangling from her right wrist (figure 13.)<sup>55</sup> This image recalls the horrifying representations of the hanged man or lynching victim. It undeniably bespeaks torture and both physical and psychic violation. Later projects embody these same visual notes veiling the architectural bodies of revered national monuments. La Porte claims that the symbolism present here is intended to omnisciently signify the unavoidable nature of mortality.<sup>56</sup> Yet this position suggests a spiritual

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<sup>52</sup> Daphne Grace. *The Woman in the Muslin Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*. (London; Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004.) 12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude. *Christo and Jeanne Claude: Early Works 1958 – 1969*. (New York, NY: Taschen, 2001) 83-84.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> La Porte, 51.

quality that would soothe mortal anxiety. On the contrary, the violent nature imbued in the Christos' early works signifies the sloppy, material world of the brutally mortal.

The same violent and aggressive qualities carry over to the monumental and architectural forms Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrap. The expansive textile drapery of the wrapped form is paired with intently tied knots. The ropes and cables that tether these architectural packages are the gags and binds that constrict the monument as a hostage. The plans for actualized project, *Wrapped Monument to Leonardo da Vinci in Milan*, again wrapped a human form and reflected the same disturbing violence as the projects for bound women (figures 14-15.)<sup>57</sup> Fabric covers the monument entirely and ropes are knotted tightly about the neck, torso, and legs of the human figure. Beyond monumental statuary, these bodily assaults are inflicted similarly upon architectural monuments such as the Reichstag. Encased in a tightly engineered steel cage, immense lengths of tarpaulin, and steel cables, these once imposing giants of history have been humiliated. Tied and bound to the earth, the grand architecture becomes trapped, just as Gulliver was tied down in his sleep by an island of tiny people.

For its paralysis, the Christos' constricted monument owes just as much to the cords binding it as it does to the fabric sheath. The Oxford English Dictionary explains that a knot is:

an intertwining or complication of the parts of one or more ropes, cords, or strips of anything flexible enough, made for the purpose of fastening them together or to another object, or to prevent slipping, and secured by being drawn tight; a tie in a rope, necktie, etc.; also, a tangle accidentally drawn tight.<sup>58</sup>

The knot is a friend or a foe depending the subject's relationship to it. This definition highlights that the function of a knot is to bind, suggesting the duty of bringing multiple elements together as one. But Jean-Luc Nancy's take on knots complicates this initial idea:

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<sup>57</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Art of Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude Wrapped Monuments Milano, Italy 1970," Christo and Jeanne-Claude. <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/wm.shtml> Accessed April 2, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2007, s.v. "knot."

The (k)not: that which involves neither interiority nor exteriority but which, in being tied, ceaselessly makes the inside pass outside, each into (or by way of) the other, the outside inside, turning endlessly back on itself—the link of *mêlée* and intrigue, confrontation and arrangement, need and desire, constraint and obligation, subjection and love, glory and pity, interest and disinterest.<sup>59</sup>

This explanation illuminates the liminality of knots. Nancy touches upon polarities yet the knot seems unfixed, and functions in accordance with duality.. Thus the knot, or node, must have a function in addition to binding. It must sever.

In the opening sentence to the essay, *The Signification of the Phallus*, Jacques Lacan states, “We know that the unconscious castration complex has the function of a knot...”<sup>60</sup> The unconscious castration complex is based in cutting, separating and disjointing. Thus there is a dual nature to the knot. The umbilical cord of a newborn is tied in order to create the navel, but first the cord must be cut from the mother before that knot may be tied. Knots *tie together* and *tie in* multiple entities but they also *tie things off*—another way to cut things apart. Cuts *cut in* and *cut through*; they interject and provide access. In providing access and interjecting, cuts perform an act related to that of tying in or tying together. In exploring the language surrounding the knot and the cut it can be seen how much they share. Here Lacan’s dualities unfold. The knot is a symbol of what holds things together and what fractures them. The Christos’ knots bind the wrapping to the object and cut it off from the outside world. The cords and knots lacing the monument fracture it – one of Anthony Vidler’s key aspects of the counter-monument – and further attack the ethos of the monumental structure.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 111.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Lacan. *Encore 1972-1973 On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. Trans. Bruce Fink. (New York, NY: Norton, 1998.) 280.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Vidler. “Counter-Monuments in Practice: The Wexner Center for the Visual Arts.” *Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, The Ohio State University*. Eisenman/Trott Architects. (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 1989.)

Spliced by ropes and knots, the Christos' wrapped monuments take on dual personalities. One defined by its everyday appearance and the other described by the Christos' transformative wrapping. Additionally, the ephemeral nature of the wrapping projects alternates the monument between its typical exposure and its alienated enclosure. Stemming from alternations, Girard approaches the concept of the double and states that "doubles are always monstrous, and duality is always an attribute of monsters."<sup>62</sup> Odon Vallet's examination of the monument, this concept parallels his reference to the monument as a "monster."<sup>63</sup> The monument's role as signifier may cast the monument as some sort of agent of violence—some sort of monster. In Vallet's essay, the term is associated with "instruction" and "*demonstration*." The monument stands as a tribute to an event (tragic or triumphant), the remains of a bygone era, and serves the purpose of instructing viewers to remember. But as such a signifier, the monument also codes the violence inherent in it. Triumphal arches mark the battles won and thus demonstrate the violence of conquest. Such monuments double as monsters. Memorial monuments address tragic violence, remembering casualties and the brutality inflicted while ruins are monuments of the past, attesting to the damaging nature of time. These monuments are somewhat like ghosts, another sort of monstrous double.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work is transformative. The wrapped monument is a double of the monument unwrapped. The monument is transformed into the unfamiliar and as a result, one must reconsider the monument's character. This sort of transformation may be like that of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Left alone, the monument's ethos is easily understood by the viewer; the unwrapped monument is rational and meaningful. However wrapped, the monument is distorted and the shocking double of what once stood in its place, a monstrous double that upsets

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<sup>62</sup> Girard, 162.

<sup>63</sup> Vallet, 21.

and fractures the original idea of the monument. Thus Christo and Jeanne-Claude's practice of wrapping the monument corrodes its character as well.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's monumental wrappings tackle objects, monuments, and the built environment in unseen but violent and obsessive ways. They compulsively pursue their game while meticulously devising plans of attack for the moment their projects may be realized. The reified projects expose the wrapped object as a trapped and abused victim. If all of this is taken into account, Christo and Jeanne-Claude are radical stalkers and spies, and their teams of workers are the offensive front. Their actions extend beyond the formalistic aesthetics they claim. The victimizing aesthetics and practices of the Christos' projects add meaning and dimension to the humanized inanimate objects and structures that are ubiquitous parts of the modern landscape.

## Images



**Figure 1**  
Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
Wall of Barrels, Iron Curtain,  
Rue Visconti, Paris 1962  
Photo: Jean-Dominique Lajoux



**Figure 2**  
Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
The Umbrellas, Japan - USA, 1984-91  
Photo: Wolfgang Volz



**Figure 3**  
 Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
 The Gates, Central Park,  
 New York City, 1979-2005  
 Photo: Wolfgang Volz



**Figure 4**  
 Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
 Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin 1971-95  
 Photo: Wolfgang Volz



**Figure 5**

Marble inscription with damnatio memoriae of Geta, son of Septimius Severus  
Roman, AD 193-211

From Rome, Italy

Removed from the memory of Roman society

Townley Collection, GR 1805.7-3.210, The British Museum



**Figure 6**

Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz,  
Monument against Fascism, 1986-93.

Harburg, Germany.

Photographed in 1990

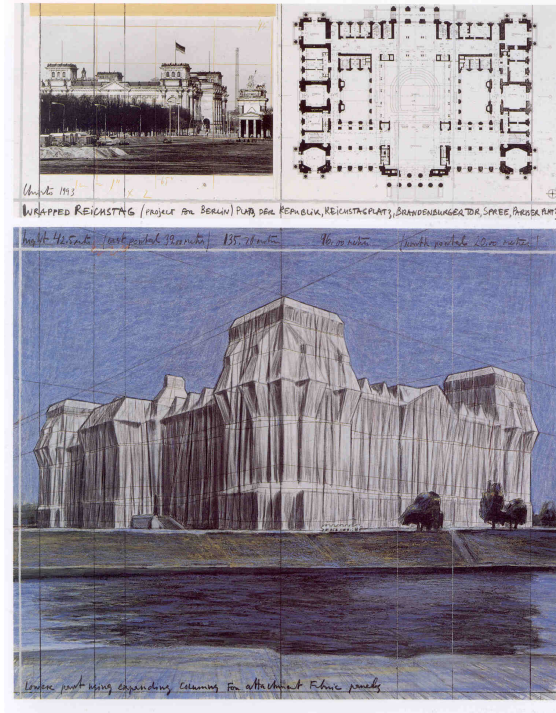




**Figure 7**  
 Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz,  
 Monument against Fascism, 1986-93.  
 Harburg, Germany.  
 Photographed in 1993



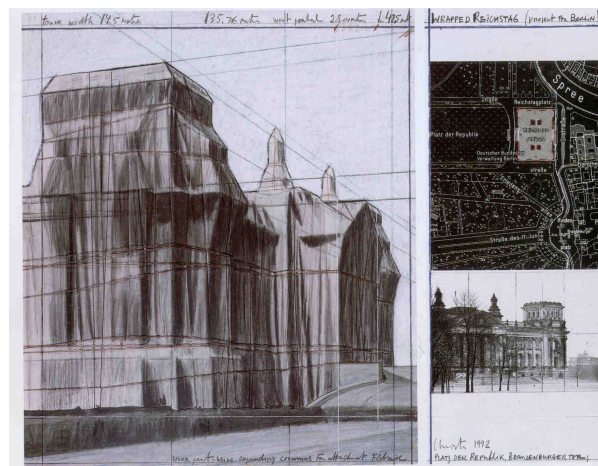
**Figure 8**  
 Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz,  
 Monument against Fascism, 1986-93.  
 Harburg, Germany.  
 Photographed in 1993



**Figure 9**

Collage in Two Parts, 1993.

Pencil, fabric, twine, charcoal, crayon, pastel, photograph by Wolfgang Volz, tape, and technical data.  
12 ½ x 30 ½ in and 26 ½ x 30 ½ in.



**Figure 10**

Collage in Two Parts, 1992.

Pencil, fabric, twine, charcoal, pastel, photograph by Wolfgang Volz, and map.  
30 ½ x 26 ¼ in. and 30 ½ x 12 in.



**Figure 11**  
 Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
 Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin 1971-95  
 Photo: A. Kazimir Ciesielski



**Figure 12**  
 The Reichstag Building c. 1890  
 Photochrom print  
 Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Photochrom Prints Collection, reproduction number LC-DIG-ppmsca-00332.



**Figure 13**

Wrapped Woman, Project for the film "Empaquetage d'une femme", May 1963, in London and Dusseldorf.  
Drawing, 1963. Pencil on paper.  
71 x 56 cm.



**Figure 14**

Wrapped Monument to Leonardo da Vinci, Project for the Piazza della Scala, Milan. Collage, 1970.  
Pencil, fabric, twine, and charcoal.  
22 x 28 in.





**Figure 15**

Wrapped Monument to Leonardo da Vinci, Piazza della Scala, Milan, 1970.  
Photo by Harry Shunk.

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